



Early Journal Content on JSTOR, Free to Anyone in the World

This article is one of nearly 500,000 scholarly works digitized and made freely available to everyone in the world by JSTOR.

Known as the Early Journal Content, this set of works include research articles, news, letters, and other writings published in more than 200 of the oldest leading academic journals. The works date from the mid-seventeenth to the early twentieth centuries.

We encourage people to read and share the Early Journal Content openly and to tell others that this resource exists. People may post this content online or redistribute in any way for non-commercial purposes.

Read more about Early Journal Content at <http://about.jstor.org/participate-jstor/individuals/early-journal-content>.

JSTOR is a digital library of academic journals, books, and primary source objects. JSTOR helps people discover, use, and build upon a wide range of content through a powerful research and teaching platform, and preserves this content for future generations. JSTOR is part of ITHAKA, a not-for-profit organization that also includes Ithaka S+R and Portico. For more information about JSTOR, please contact support@jstor.org.

NORTH AMERICAN REVIEW

NO. DCLXXXIV

NOVEMBER, 1912

THE ISSUE OF 1912

DEMOCRACY OR THE DEMAGOGUE

BY ARISTOTLE

THE most pure democracy is that which is called so principally from the equality which prevails in it: for this is what the law in that state directs, that the poor shall be in no greater subjection than the rich; and that the supreme power shall not be lodged with either of these, but that both shall share it alike. For if liberty and equality, as some persons suppose, are chiefly to be found in a democracy, it must be most so, by every department of government being alike open to all; but as the people are the majority, and what they vote is law, it follows that such a state must be a democracy. This, then, is one species of a democratic government.

Another is, when the magistrates are elected by a certain census, the standard of which is low; and where every one who possesses property ought to have a share in the government, but as soon as he has lost that property, he ought no longer. Another sort is, that in which every man who is not under ban has a share in the government, but where the government is in the law. Another, where

Copyright, 1912, by THE NORTH AMERICAN REVIEW PUBLISHING COMPANY. All Rights Reserved

every one, provided he be a citizen, has this right, but where the government is in the law.

Another is the same with these in other particulars, but allows the people and not the law to be supreme; and this takes place when everything is determined by a majority of votes, and not by a law, a thing which happens by reason of the demagogues. For where a democracy is governed by stated laws, there is no room for a demagogue, but men of worth fill the first offices in the state; but where the power is not vested in the laws, there demagogues abound. For there the people's voice becomes that of a king, the whole composing one body; for they are supreme, not as individuals, but in their collective capacity. Homer also says,

“Ill fares it, where the multitude hath sway”;

but whether he means this kind of democracy, or one where the many are individually supreme, is uncertain. Now, when the people possess this power, they desire to be altogether absolute, that they may not be under the control of the law, and they grow despotical, so that flatterers are held in repute; and such a people become analogous to tyranny among the forms of monarchy; for their manners are the same, and they both hold a despotic power over better persons than themselves. For their decrees are like the others' edicts; and a demagogue with them is like a flatterer among the others; but both these two classes abound with each, flatterers with tyrants, and demagogues among such a people. And to them it is owing that the supreme power is lodged in the votes of the people, and not in written laws; for they bring everything before them. And this they do because they have influence, on account of the supreme power being lodged in the people; for these are they whom the multitude obey. Besides, those who inveigh against rulers are wont to say that the people ought to be the judges of their conduct; and the people gladly receive their complaints as the means of destroying all their offices.

Any one, therefore, may with great justice blame such a government by calling it a democracy, and not a free state; for where the government is not vested in the laws, then there is no free state, for the law ought to be supreme over all things; and particularly incidents which arise, should be determined by the magistrates or by the state. If, therefore, a democracy is to be reckoned as one among free states, it is evident that any such establishment which centres all power in the votes of the people cannot, properly speaking, be a democracy; for their decrees cannot be general in their extent. Let this, then, be our description of the several species of democracies.

* * * * *

We ought now to inquire separately into the events which will arise from these causes in each species of government. Democracies will be most subject to revolutions from the dishonesty of their demagogues; for partly by informing against men of property, and partly by rousing the common people against them, they induce them to join together, for a common fear will make the greatest enemies unite:—and this is what any one may continually see practised in many states. In the island of Cos, for instance, the democracy was subverted by the wickedness of the demagogues, for the nobles entered into a combination with each other. And at Rhodes, the demagogues distributed bribes, and so prevented the people from paying the Trierarchs what was owing to them; and the latter were obliged, by the number of actions brought against them, to conspire together and destroy the popular state.

The popular state too was overthrown at Heraclea, soon after the settlement of the city, by the same persons; for the citizens of note, being ill-treated by them, quitted the city, but afterwards the exiles banded together and returned, and overthrew the popular state. Just in the same manner the democracy was destroyed in Megara; for there

the demagogues, to procure money by confiscations, kept on driving out the nobles, until the number of those who were banished became considerable; and those returned and got the better of the people in a battle, and so established an oligarchy. The like happened at Cyme, during the time of the democracy which Thrasymachus destroyed; and whoever considers what has happened in other states may perceive that revolutions have arisen from the same causes. For often, to curry favor with the people, they drive the nobles to conspire together, either by dividing their estates, or by obliging them to spend them on public services, or by publicly impeaching them, that they may be able to confiscate the fortunes of the wealthy.

In former times, whenever the same person was both demagogue and general, the democracies were changed into tyrannies; and indeed most of the ancient tyrants were once demagogues. And there is a reason why such was the case at that time, but not now; for at that time the demagogues were of the soldiery; (for they were not as yet powerful by their eloquence); but now that the art of oratory is cultivated, the able speakers lead the people; but, as they are unqualified to act in a military capacity, they cannot impose themselves on the people as tyrants, if we except one or two trifling instances. Formerly, too, tyrannies were more common than now, because great powers were more often intrusted to some magistrates than now (as to the Prytanes at Miletus; for they were supreme in many things of the last consequence); and also because at that time the cities were not of that very great extent, and the people in general lived in the country, employed in husbandry, the leaders of public affairs, if they had a turn for war, tried to make themselves tyrants.

All this they did as soon as they had gained the confidence of the people; and this confidence was their hatred to the rich. This was the case of Pisistratus at Athens, when he opposed the Pedieans: and of Theaganes in Megara, who slaughtered the cattle belonging to the

rich, after he had seized those who kept them by the river-side. Theagenes also, on account of having accused Daphnaeus and the rich, was thought worthy of being raised to a tyranny, for in consequence of these enmities the people trusted him as a man of popular principles.

Governments also alter from their ancient democratic form into one entirely new; for where magistrates are elected without a fixed income, and the election is with the people, the aspirants for office, to flatter them, endeavour with all their power to make the people superior even to the laws.

* * * * *

It is very right that the many should have the greatest powers in their own hands; for the people, the council, and the judges are composed of them, and the property of all these collectively is more than the property of any person, or of a few who fill the great offices of the state; and thus let us determine these points.

But the first question that we stated shows nothing besides so plainly as that the supreme power should be lodged in laws duly made, and that the magistrate, or magistrates (either one or more), should be authorized to determine those cases on which the laws cannot define particularly; as it is impossible for them, in general language, to explain themselves upon everything that may arise. But what these laws are, which are established upon the best foundations, has not been yet explained, but still remains a matter of some question: but the laws of every state will necessarily be like the state itself, either trifling or excellent, just or unjust; for it is evident that the laws which are framed must correspond to the constitution of the government; and if so, it is plain that a well-formed government will have good laws, a bad one, bad ones. (

And for this reason it is as much a man's duty to submit to command as to assume it, and this also by rotation; for this is law, for order is law; and it is more proper that

the law should govern, than any one of the citizens. Upon the same principle, if it is advantageous to place the supreme power in some particular persons, they should be appointed to be only guardians and servants of the laws, for the supreme power must be placed somewhere; but they say that it is unjust that, where all are equal, one person should continually enjoy it. But man would scarcely be able to adjust that which the law cannot determine. It may be replied that the law, having purposely laid down the best rules, leaves the rest to be adjusted by the most fair decision, and to be regulated by the magistrates; besides, it allows anything to be altered which experience proves may be better established.

Moreover, he who bids the law to be supreme, makes God supreme (and the laws); but he who intrusts man with supreme power gives it to a wild beast, for such his appetites sometimes make him; passion, too, influences those who are in power, even the very best of men; for which reason the law is intellect free from appetite.

* * * * *

There are three qualifications necessary for those who intend to fill the first departments in government; first of all, an affection for the established constitution; in the second place, abilities wholly equal to the business of their office; in the third place, virtue and justice correspondent to the nature of that particular state in which they are placed; for if justice is not the same in all states, it is evident that there must be different species of it.

There may be some doubt, when all these qualifications do not meet in the same person, in what manner the choice shall be made; as, for instance, suppose that one person is an accomplished general, but a bad man, and no friend to the constitution, while another is just, and a friend to it, how ought the choice to be made? We should then consider, of two qualities, which of them the generality possess in a greater, and which in a less, degree. For this reason,

in the choice of a general we should regard his courage more than his character, as the more uncommon quality; as fewer men partake of military skill than of virtue; but, to protect the state or manage the finances, the contrary rule should be followed; for these require greater virtue than that which the generality possess, but mere knowledge is common to all.

It may be questioned, if a man has abilities for statesmanship, and is well affected to the constitution, what occasion is there for being virtuous, since these two things alone are sufficient to render him useful to the public? But it is of use, because those who possess the above qualities are often deficient in prudence; for, as men often neglect their own affairs, though they know them, and love themselves, so nothing will prevent them from being disposed towards the commonwealth in the same manner.

In short, whatever is contained in the laws, and which we allow to be useful to states, all contributes to preserve the state; but its principal support (as has been often urged) is to secure that the number of those who desire to preserve it shall be greater than of those who wish to destroy it.

Above all things, one must not be forgotten, though it is forgotten by many governments which are now corrupted, namely, the mean. For many things which seem favourable to a democracy destroy a democracy, and many which seem favourable to an oligarchy, tend to destroy it. Those who think this the only virtue extend it to an excess; for they do not consider that as a nose which varies a little from perfect straightness, either towards being aquiline or flat, may yet be beautiful and agreeable to look at, but that still if any one extend this variation too far, first of all the properties of the part itself will be lost, till at last it can hardly be admitted to be a nose at all, on account of the excess of the rise or sinking—that thus, I say, it is with other parts of the human body. So also the same thing is true with respect to the other states; for

both an oligarchy and a democracy may vary somewhat from their most perfect form, and yet be well constituted; but if any one endeavors to extend either of them too far, at first he will make the government worse, but at last he will bring it to no government at all.

The lawgiver and the politician, then, should know well what preserves and what destroys the democracy of the people or the oligarchy of the few; for neither the one nor the other can possibly continue without both rich and poor; but that whenever an entire equality of circumstances prevails, the state must necessarily become of another form; so that those who destroy these laws which authorize an inequality destroy the government. . . . But of all things hitherto mentioned, that which contributes most to preserve the state is, what is now most despised, to educate children with reference to the state; for the most useful laws, and most approved by every statesman, will be of no service, if the citizens are not accustomed to and brought up in the principles of the constitution; of a democracy, if that form is by law established; or an oligarchy, if it be an oligarchy. For if there is such a thing as incontinence in an individual, there is also in a city. But to educate a child in a way fitting to the state, is not to do such things as will gratify those who have the power in an oligarchy, or who desire a democracy, but to do those things whereby they will be able to conduct respectively either of these forms of governments. But now the children of the magistrates in an oligarchy are brought up delicately, and the children of the poor are made hardy with exercise and labour; so that they are both desirous of change, and able to promote it. In democracies of the purest form a method is pursued which is contrary to their welfare; the reason of which is that they define freedom wrongly.

Now, there are two things which seem to be the limits of a democracy, that the people in general are supreme, and enjoy freedom; for that which is just seems to be equal, and it is just that what the people determine should be

supreme. Now, their freedom and equality consist in every one's doing as he pleases. So that, in such a democracy every one may live as he likes; "as leads his bent," to use the words of Euripides. But this is wrong, for no one ought to think it slavery to live in conformity with government, but protection. The causes, then, of corruption in different states, and the means of their preservation and continuance, to speak simply, are such as we have related.

* * * * *

Demagogues are of two sorts; the one flatter the few when they are in power: for even among the few there are demagogues; such were Charicles and his followers at Athens, who had great influence over the Thirty; and, in the same manner, Phrynichus over the Four Hundred. The others are those demagogues who have a share in the oligarchy and flatter the people; such were the state-guardians at Larissa, who flattered the people, because they were elected by them. And this will always happen in every oligarchy where the magistrates do not elect themselves, but are chosen out of men either of great fortune or certain ranks by the soldiers or by the people, as was the custom at Abydos. And when the judicial department is not in the hands of the supreme power, the demagogues favour the people in their causes, and so overturn the government; which happened at Heraclea in Pontus.

* * * * *

Revolutions also sometimes take place in a democracy, though more seldom; for where the poor increase faster than men of property, the state becomes an oligarchy or dynasty. Governments also sometimes alter without seditions: by petty contention, as at Heraea: for which purpose they changed the mode of election from votes to lots, and thus got the contentious parties chosen; and by negligence, as when the citizens admit to state offices men who are not friends to the constitution: an event which

happened at Orus, when the oligarchy of the archons was suppressed at the election of Heracleodorus, who changed that form of government into a democratic free state.

* * * * *

In general, then, the beginnings and causes of seditions in all states are such as I have now described, and revolutions in them are brought about in two ways, either by violence or fraud; and if by violence, then either at first or by compelling them afterwards to submit. They may also be brought about by fraud in two different ways, either when the people, being at first deceived, willingly consent to an alteration in their government, but are afterwards obliged by force to abide by it; as, for instance, when the Four Hundred imposed upon the people, by telling them that the king of Persia would supply them with money for the war against the Lacedaemonians; and after they had been guilty of this lie, they endeavoured to keep possession of the supreme power; or when they are at first persuaded, and afterwards consent to be governed. By one or other, then, of the methods above mentioned, all revolutions in governments are brought about.

* * * * *

It follows next that we consider the means of preserving both governments in general, and each state in particular. In the first place, then, it is evident, that if we are right as to the causes of their destruction, we know also the means of their preservation; for things contrary produce contrary effects; but destruction and preservation are contrary to each other. In well-tempered governments, it requires much care to watch that nothing be done contrary to law: and this ought chiefly to be attended to in matters of small consequence; for a small transgression comes on with secret step, just as in a family small expenses when often repeated consume a man's income. For the understanding is deceived thereby, as it were by this sophism, "if every part is little, then the whole is little."

Now, this in one sense is true, but in another it is false, for the whole and all the parts together are large, though made up of small parts. This first step, therefore, in any matter is what the state ought to guard against. In the next place, no credit ought to be given to those arguments which are composed to deceive the people; for they are confuted by facts. But what we mean by the sophistical devices of states has been already mentioned. You may often perceive both aristocracies and oligarchies continuing firm, not from the stability of their forms of government, but from the wise conduct of the magistrates, both towards those who have a part in the management of public affairs, and those also who have not: towards those who have not, by never injuring them, and by introducing those who are of the most consequence amongst them into office, and by never harshly disgracing those who are desirous of honour, or injuring the multitude for the sake of gain; towards themselves and those who have a share, by behaving justly towards each other.

For that equality which the favourers of a democracy seek to establish in the state is not only just, but convenient also, amongst those who are of the same rank. And for this reason, if the administration is in the hands of the many, several rules which are established in democracies will be very useful; as to let no one continue in office longer than six months, so that all of the same rank may have their turn; for between these there is a sort of democracy, for which reason demagogues are most likely to arise up amongst them, as we have already mentioned.

Besides, by this means both aristocracies and democracies will be the less liable to be corrupted into dynasties. And this, because it will not be easy for those who are magistrates for a short time to do as much mischief as they could in a long time; for it is from hence that tyrannies arise in democracies and oligarchies; for either those who are most powerful in each state establish a tyranny, as the demagogues in the one and the despots in the other,

or else this is done by the chief magistrates when they are long in power.

Governments are preserved, not only by having the means of their corruption at a great distance, but sometimes also by its being very near them; for those who are in continual fear, keep a stricter hand over the state; for which reason it is necessary for those who have the care of the constitution to be able to awaken the fears of the people, that they may preserve it, and not to be remiss in protecting the state, as a night watch, but to make the distant danger appear at hand.

ARISTOTLE.